

Testimony to the Joint Committee on Aging February 26, 2013

H.B. 6460 AN ACT LIMITING THE RELEASE OF INFORMATION ABOUT MISSING ADULTS

To the Joint Committee on Aging, my name is Kerri-Lynn Dirgo, and I live in Bridgeport, CT. **I am here today to respectfully request that you support H.B. 6460 AN ACT LIMITING THE RELEASE OF INFORMATION ABOUT MISSING ADULTS.**

As a young adult with a mental health diagnosis, the current implementation of the Silver Alert System is affecting my peers with mental impairments who are over the age of 18. By including information about individuals' diagnosis and symptoms is a violation of our confidentiality, and may subject us to discrimination. While it may be well intended, and meant to let the community know how important it is that the person be found, I believe it needs to be approached in a different manner.

As a young adult in recovery, I regularly experience prejudice and discrimination...and this is an ongoing battle, which runs concurrently with maintaining my mental health. Confidentiality is a very important matter to many people receiving treatment, and is honored by doctors and care providers throughout the state for very good reasons. It's important that my peers and I not be stigmatized so that we have an equal opportunity when it comes to employment, or even interacting with other community members.

Consider the recent Silver Alert that went out for my peer, Cristina E. Perez, 23, on January 15, 2013. In the Silver Alert it refers to her as, "homeless", "and is in need of medication." If you would like to read the full Silver Alert for Cristina, I recommend that you include "Cristina E. Perez and Connecticut" in a Google search – it should be the first search result on the page. Now, I guess we can wish Cristina good luck finding housing and a job since her name is now linked directly to having a mental impairment because of the use of a Silver Alert, along with homelessness and the need for medication.

By breaching the confidentiality of my peers, I also fear that potential predators may become aware of their vulnerability. It would be reasonable to conclude that if a Silver Alert is issued for a young adult, that they are in a vulnerable state, unable to care for themselves, and potentially unable to make good decisions about who to trust. It's also reasonable to conclude that some types of predators seek out defenseless victims to target. Publicly announcing that there is a young woman or man out there suffering from PTSD, Schizophrenia, Autism or Traumatic Brain Injuries may be just the neon sign that these predators are looking for. I'm afraid it would be close to delivering a victim into a predator's hands.

Again, I understand that the objective is to assure the safety of these individuals, and express the urgency that they are found. I believe a general statement such as, "(this person) may be in need of urgent medical care," does not put the individual at risk for discrimination or abuse because that could mean any number of things. It would not disclose the individuals compromised state of mind.

In closing, I respectfully ask that you support **H.B. 6460 AN ACT LIMITING THE RELEASE OF INFORMATION ABOUT MISSING ADULTS**, and I'd like to thank the Committee on Aging for giving me the opportunity to speak on behalf of myself, my peers, and my community.

Thank you very much for allowing me to share my testimony with you today.